

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 18, Number 2

Spring, 2017

Ongoing Dharma

It's finally warmed up and there are daffodils. Three weeks ago the snowdrops – the first flowers of spring – were buried under snow. However, they know how to take care of themselves in hard times. When it's cold they wilt, so their stems don't freeze. When the snow is gone, they stand up again.

Legend has it that Siddhartha Gautama was born in spring among the flowers in Lumbini Garden. He was born to bring the teaching back into the world, to make the flower of the dharma once again unfold. With his birth, once again the dharma was sprouting like a new snowdrop in spring.

“Wait!” you may say, “Wasn't Shakyamuni the first one to bring the dharma to the world?” As you exclaim this you may have a vague memory of having chanted the names of six buddhas before Shakyamuni Buddha at some ceremony or other. Everyone agrees that those weren't real historical buddhas, but they are there to remind us that the dharma – the teaching we live by – began when the universe began. Bibashi Butsu (Vipashin Buddha) and the names that follow him hark back to unknown human beings who in the past have taught the dharma. They also signify others will come in the future as well. Maitreya – Friendly One – is the next one's name. Don't hold your breath, though. He or she won't arrive soon.

Why does this cycle happen? Because there is impermanence. Everything, including the dharma, arises, matures, is here for a while, then disappears into new forms. The dharma – the teaching of how reality operates - is not different. It appears, grows, declines, and disappears. Then, like a snowdrop in March, it appears again. This is lucky for us.

What is dharma? It's the understanding of how things operate and how we cause suffering and destruction when we don't understand. It's the Four Noble Truths and the understanding that all reality arises in each moment, the flowering of impermanence and interdependence. It's the realization that peace comes when we put aside our ideas – our dreams – and wake up to the reality of things.

Shakyamuni Buddha didn't come into the world to tell us the dharma so we could obey it like a law. He came to show the truth of reality so we could live it and help others live it. The Four Noble Truths are “noble” because living them makes us noble. We become the best human being that we can be.

We become gracious, honorable, worthy. And with our lives we show others how to do it.

There is no right way or wrong way to live dharma. There is just doing what leads to wholesomeness and wellbeing for all things in this moment. The only way to find this is to act and then examine the consequences. Has what I have done produced results that would make the wise nod quietly? Has it led to a better situation for all beings and the universe in general? If not, we change our approach and do it differently next time.

We often worry about destroying the dharma as it mixes with our American ideas, but the dharma is pretty resilient. It has weathered many changes and insults and has survived. In tenth- and eleventh-century China, the government sold ordinations.¹ A man purchasing an ordination certificate was exempt from military duty and the state got needed income. The dharma survived this, along with a number of periods of persecution. Even after fifty years of suppression, the dharma is alive today in China.

On the personal level, sometimes our awakening gets beaten down by hard times. Sometimes it seems to disappear altogether. It's just like the dharma in the world - arising, developing, abiding, and disappearing. Like the dharma, it will return when conditions are right.

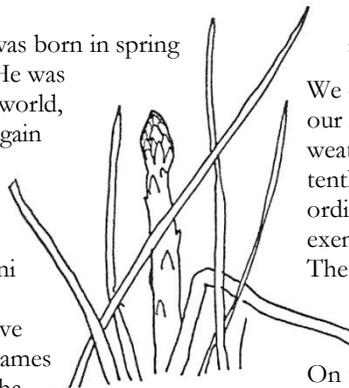
We can create the conditions through our practice. When we wake from the dreams of our preferences and prejudices, the dharma is there waiting for us. The activity of putting aside our ideas and seeing the reality of life is the dharma living and it is us waking up – the Buddha's enlightenment.

In our practicing and waking up the dharma is born fresh and new. Legend has it that at his birth the Buddha took seven steps in each of the four directions. These steps represent the Seven Factors of Awakening, things we do to create the conditions for waking up. They are mindfulness, allowing things to reveal themselves, perseverance, ease (dealing with stress, anxiety), joy, *zazen*, and seeing all sides equally. Doing these things is the Buddha's awakening and the Buddha's wisdom.

Each time we see that we are dreaming and wake up, paying attention to reality, letting go of self-referential thoughts, approaching life with joy and curiosity, the dharma has sprouted up new and supple in the world. We are the infant Buddha looking at the world with joyous, curious eyes, waiting for it to reveal itself.

- Zuikō Redding

¹ Ch'en, Kenneth K. S. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, pp. 247–8.



Miso's Middle Way

Shakyamuni Buddha is reputed to have said:

Truly seeing the aggregation of the world, the view of nonexistence does not arise. Truly seeing the nonsubstantiality of the world, the view of existence does not arise. The view that all things exist is one extreme; the view that nothing exists is the other extreme. Being apart from these two extremes, the Tathagata teaches the dharma of the Middle Way: because this exists, that exists; because this arises, that arises.²

The “Middle Way” is totally understanding interdependence and living your life accordingly.

Prior to studying and practicing Buddhism, I most meaningfully learned the Middle Way from dogs. More specifically, my late boxer, Miso, has been my greatest teacher of the Middle Way. During the time I was attempting to make a living via music, I worked at Call of the Wild School for Dogs in Chicago. It was a cool job, for the most part. The owner paid me fairly well for the menial work I was doing, and she would let me take several weeks off at a time to go on tour with my band and let me keep the same job when I returned. I learned a ton while working at Call of the Wild. But I learned way more from the dogs I worked with than I did from the humans.

Most dogs are Zen masters. By that I mean that they live and act in the moment without letting their thoughts and preconceived notions cloud their judgments and actions. They're able to do this because they don't seem to have the capacity to think about things in the same ways that humans do. They don't need to practice zazen. They need not train themselves to let go of their thoughts — they have no critical thoughts to let go of. I'm sure this is true of most species, but my most meaningful non-human experiences have been with dogs and, as a result, dogs are who I know and have learned the most from.

Dogs understand interdependence — the Middle Way — on an intuitive level that most human beings, after years of socialization, often don't. We would have anywhere from twenty to forty dogs at a time running around in the daycare room. Some would keep to themselves, choosing to lie in a corner, some would find a buddy or two to pal around with. Some were just obnoxious, perpetual instigators, constantly chasing other dogs or nipping at others' legs or doing whatever else they could do to get attention. But there was usually a balance that was kept. When an instigator crossed a line with the other dogs, there would be a quick scuffle and balance would be restored. The dogs seemed to have an intuitive sense of the energies they were all putting out into the room, and they would seamlessly work together in a way that allowed everyone to find where they fit.

Whenever a new dog or new human entered the daycare room I would get to learn more about how interdependence works. If a human whom the dogs didn't know exhibited any nervousness, fear, anxiety, or aggression, the dogs would immediately respond. They would know right away if the

new human was throwing the room's energy out of balance and they'd try to do something about it, be it bark or jump or bite or scuffle with each other. The exact same thing was true of new dogs. We daycare workers had to be careful when introducing new dogs to the group. This is where Miso came in super handy.

Miso was a flawless judge of dog energy. When we'd get a new dog, I'd first put him or her into an enclosed area with only myself and Miso. If Miso and the new dog simply sniffed each other and then went about their usual business, I knew right away that the new dog would be fine and not start conflicts with the large group. On the other hand, if Miso's hackles were raised by the new dog I knew we'd need to introduce the new dog slowly and more carefully with the right small group of dogs first. After he or she was acclimated to that small group we could try to slowly introduce her or him to the larger group. Miso was always right. There was never a dog that Miso approved of who didn't immediately get along with the large group.

Miso and the other dogs at Call of the Wild taught me to observe the energies of other beings; to be aware of the fact that all our energies arise together, cease together, and constantly shape and are shaped by everything and everyone around us. Dogs don't overthink anything; they take in sensory phenomena and act accordingly, always intuitively mindful of the fact that “because this exists, that exists; because this arises, that arises.” Dogs are masters of the Middle Way. Because I had previously studied at the paws of so many amazing dogs for so many years, when I began studying and practicing Buddhism, comprehending and practicing the Middle Way was much more intuitive than it probably would've been otherwise.

I'd like to briefly echo Kosho Uchiyama at this point and stress that the Middle Way of Buddhist practice is *not*, as it is often misunderstood to be, some form of social neutrality — I know it's often misunderstood this way, because I, too, misunderstood it this way until I actually began studying and practicing. The Middle Way is understanding interdependence and living accordingly; that's it. But practicing the Middle Way has very large ramifications. As the title of Howard Zinn's autobiography says “You can't be neutral on a moving train.” Fully grasping the Middle Way and our interdependence with all thing means fully embracing Zinn's sentiment. As Uchiyama says,

...the Middle Way in Buddhism does not mean taking some in-between position that has been conjured up in our heads, nor acting in a compromising way. Rather, despite the fact that we latch on to our ideas of being or nonbeing, taking the Middle Way means to demolish all concepts set up in our minds and, without fixing on reality as any particular thing, to open the hand of thought, allowing life to be life.³

Because I'm practicing understanding interdependence, I know how important it is for me to live in ways in which I

² Uchiyama, Kosho. *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004, pp. 97-98.

³ *Opening the Hand of Thought*, pp.101-102

will contribute to the work being done to bring about a more just society.

But know this: there isn't *one* correct "way." Anyone who tells you that they know *the* way or *the* truth is trying to sell you something other than the proverbial water that is already flowing before you, free for the drinking. I've found my current "way" through Jim O'Rourke records, through reading Sartre and Marx and Dogen, through my partner Jamie's love, through countless mistakes, through communicating with dogs and trees, through the influence of my parents and sister, through trying to teach teenagers that there are no simple answers to complex problems, through zazen, through touring with a hip-hop duo, through paying attention to the things my son Avram tells me. There are as many "ways" as there are beings to perceive and experience a "way." Find *your own way* in accordance with observing reality as you perceive and experience it; that's *the* way.

- Stefen Robinson

Annual Meeting

Our Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, April 23.

The schedule is as follows –

- 9:00 a.m. Zazen
- 9:45 Dharma talk
- 10:15 Sangha meeting, followed by board meeting
- 12:00 Potluck lunch (bring a dish to share)
- 3:00 p.m. Adjourn

Members will be electing people to fill two board positions during the sangha meeting. If you think you'd like to be a board member or if you have agenda items, please contact Eric Higgins-Freese at ehigginsfreese@gmail.com.

Though only board members may vote in the board meeting, sangha members' participation and ideas are essential in helping determine the Zen Center's direction. We welcome all participation.

Things to Do

Looking for something to do?

Write for the newsletter Perhaps you have a story to tell about your practice. Send it in for the newsletter. A tale about how you came to the practice, what it's done for you, or about a dharma-learning experience is really helpful.

Buildings and grounds Like to work with your hands? Help develop and work on repair, maintenance, and upgrading projects for our structure and its yard and gardens.

Credits

Artwork	Tom Rauschke
Writing	Zuikō Redding
Editing	Travis Hunt

June All-Day Sitting

Celebrating the solstice

with Jisho Siebert

June 25

5:00 a.m. to 4:20 p.m.

Join us for all or part of
the day



If you're here for lunch, please bring a dish to share
Breakfast is provided.

Out-of-town participants are welcome to stay at Zen Center

Cost: none – dana is gratefully accepted

Everyone is welcome at 9:00 a.m. zazen and dharma talk

To register or get more details, contact us

phone: (319) 247-5986
email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org
web: www.cedarrapidszencenter.org

Announcements

Zen Practice and Tradition The next offering of the four-session course on the basics of Buddhism will begin on June 6. Both beginning practitioners and people who want to learn a bit about Buddhism are welcome. Fee is \$50 (\$25 for students and those with fixed incomes).

Bloomington-Normal – May 6 Zuiko will be sitting with the Bloomington-Normal group on May 6. For more information, please email Stefen Robinson - stefenrobinson@gmail.com

Work days Our next work days will be on May 20 and June 17. Work begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. Lunch – pizza from Zoey's – is provided.

Published by

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Zen Practice and Tradition Course

June 6, 13, 20, 27

September 5, 12, 19, 26

Dharma Study

Every Monday – 6:30 p.m.

Daily Schedule

MORNING ZAZEN

Sunday Morning
9:00 – 9:40 am zazen
9:45 – 10:30 dharmatalk
10:30 – 11:15 work
11:15 – 11:45 tea

NOON ZAZEN

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday
12:15 – 12:55 pm zazen

EVENING ZAZEN

Tuesday – 20-minute zazen periods
(kids are welcome)
6:30 – 6:50 pm zazen
6:50 – 7:00 kinhin
7:00 – 7:20 zazen
7:20 – 7:30 kinhin
7:30 – 8:00 zazen

Wednesday, Thursday

6:30 – 7:10 pm zazen
7:10 – 7:20 kinhin
7:20 – 8:00 zazen

Third Wednesday each month

7:30 – 9:00 zazen instruction

Sesshins and All-day Sittings

April	9	Buddha's Birthday
	19	Introduction to zazen
	23	Annual Meeting
May	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	All-day sitting
June	21	Introduction to zazen
	25	All day sitting
July	14 - 16	Sesshin
	19	Introduction to zazen
August	16	Introduction to zazen
	20	All-day sitting
September	17	All-day sitting
	20	Introduction to zazen
October	13 - 15	Sesshin (Daruma)
	18	Introduction to zazen
November	15	Introduction to zazen
	19	All-day sitting
December	1 - 3	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	20	Introduction to zazen
	31	New Year's sitting